

FACT SHEET

Environmental Illness

What is an environmental illness?

Environmental Illness (EI) or Chemical Hypersensitivity Syndrome, is an immune system disorder which involves severe reactions to many everyday chemicals and products. Since World War II, there have been many changes in our environment--innovations in manufacturing, hundreds of new synthetic materials, increasing numbers of additives in our food and water, and a rise in air pollution, both in and out of doors. Corresponding to this increased chemical load, we have seen the emergence of systemic immunological disorders like EI. For some people EI occurs as a dramatic onset precipitated by a major chemical exposure or industrial accident. For many, the condition develops gradually as the result of the cumulative exposures of daily life.

What are its symptoms?

A person with EI has a systemic physical reaction to petrochemicals, formaldehyde and coal-tar derivatives present in auto exhaust, synthetic fabrics, artificial fragrances, cleaning products, fresh paint, new building materials, pesticides, cigarette smoke (as well as the chemical residue it leaves on clothing and hair). Many people with EI also develop allergies to dust, pollen, animal dander, molds and/or entire food groups as the immune system struggles to cope with the stress of chemical overload.

EI reactions commonly include migraine headaches, fatigue, muscle weakness, gastrointestinal disturbances, arthritic pain, cerebral/behavioral symptoms such as confusion, forgetfulness, agitation and mood swings, and more "traditional" allergic symptoms like asthma and hives. Exact sensitivities vary from person to person, and reactions vary in intensity and duration, usually lasting from a few hours to several days. Individual tolerance levels on a given day may be influenced by variables such as humidity, air pollution, stress and cumulative exposure loads.

Environmental Illness and Accessibility

Many people with severe EI cannot enter most buildings or attend public functions as people with EI need to reduce their exposure to harmful substances. In order to make an event accessible to people with EI, all who attend must make it a point not to wear perfumes or scented products.

They ask that you use unscented personal care products and unscented laundry preparations--that you not wear perfumes or scents--to an EI accessible event. Scented products include soap, shampoo, hair conditioner and mousse, lotion, cosmetics, essential oil, deodorant, laundry detergent, fabric softener/antistatic laundry additives ("Bounce"), hairspray, chapstick, analgesic balm, mothballs, and insect repellent.

What may seem to be a mild fragrance can constitute a toxic exposure for a person with EI.

Here are some examples of readily available unscented products.

SOAPS: Almay, Clinique, Conti Castille Soap, Kiss My Face Olive, Phisoderm/Soapure, Sirenia Coconut Soap, Rokoach Kosher Soap, Simple Soap, The Chef's Soap, Unscented Veget Glycerin Soap, Dr. Bonner's Supermild Castille

**SHAMPOOS AND
CONDITIONERS:** Almay, Clinique, Granny's, Infinity, Tom's

LAUNDRY DETERGENTS: Borax, Country Safe, Dermasafe, Granny's Old Fashioned, baking soda, Neolife Green

COSMETICS: Almay, Clinique, Earthtones, Ida Grae, Lancome, Bare Escentuals

LOTIONS: Almay, Nature's Plus Vitamin E Cream, Clinique, Skin Trip Moisture Cream, Mountain Ocean Cream, Pure Almond (olive or sesame oil), Moisturizer, Granny's

DEODORANTS: Almay, Nature de France, Tom's Unscented Roll-On, baking soda, many unscented brands

**SUNTAN
PREPARATIONS:** Mountain Ocean Sun, Rainbow Aloe Paba SPF 8 and 15

TOOTHPASTE: Tom's

TIPS

- 1) Read labels. Avoid products which list fragrance, perfume, scent, phenol, quaternium-15, or talc. Avoid deodorant soaps.
- 2) Check clothing for "scent cling" from earlier wearings, and air out until no trace of scent remains.
- 3) Thoroughly air out clothing that has been dry cleaned or stored with mothballs.

DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

Oahu

**(808) 586-8121 (Voice/TTY)
(808) 586-8129 (FAX)**

**E-mail
Web Site**

accesshi@aloha.net
www.hawaii.gov/health/dcab/

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**984-2400, ext. 6-8121# (Voice)
1(800) 468-4644, ext. 6-8121# (Voice)
274-3141, ext. 6-8121# (Voice)
974-4000, ext. 6-8121# (Voice)**